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ABSTRACT

The transition from face-to-face to on-line instruction illustrates the need for guidelines that can be used to guide the development of courses that will be substantially equivalent to traditional instruction. In 1999 the American Counseling Association approved 27 standards for informing counselor educators of critical issues that require careful consideration of on-line courses. The complete approved standards are represented in this chapter along with brief discussions to help counselor educators and others understand the intentions of the authors and contributors and to further promote quality practice in counselor education. The standards address the issues of: course quality, course content/objectives, instructional support, faculty qualifications, instructor/course evaluation, technological standards, and grievance procedures. Concerns related to guideline implementation and on-line course design are also presented. As more becomes known about on-line instruction and what does and does not work for students in counseling programs, or as technological advances enhance the quality of and possibilities for on-line instruction, it will be important to revisit and modify these guidelines. (Contains 16 references.) (MKA)

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M. Harry Daniels, J. Michael Tyler, and B. Scott Christie

The World Wide Web has become a ubiquitous component of American life. Television ads now provide web addresses to obtain information. Movie studios create elaborate web sites to promote their latest movie. Even school children are making the web a part of their routine. Web66 (1998) currently maintains a list of over 13,000 K–12 institutions that have their own web presence.

At the postsecondary level, 33% of all college courses use the Internet, with 22% of all courses using web pages for class materials (Green, 1998). An estimated 753,640 students formally enrolled in distance education courses in the academic year 1994–95 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). A growing number of large universities now offer complete master's degrees in business through the Internet. In short, the World Wide Web has created a new medium for distance education and new opportunities for place-bound learners. Counselor education programs have also been influenced by these trends, and a master's degree in human services with an emphasis in counseling is being offered in its entirety as an on-line program (Capella University, 1999).

A review of materials suggests that in the postsecondary classroom, the Internet is used in one of several ways. Some institutions are taking a minimalist approach where the only information available on-line is a brief course description, or perhaps a course syllabus. A few institutions have pushed to the other extreme and are

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working to provide entire courses, and in some cases entire programs, over the Internet. A third group is seeking out a midline position where courses are supported or enhanced by materials available on-line. Regardless of which approach an institution or counselor education program takes, the process is largely one of trial and error. As noted by Thyer, Artelt, and Markward (1998), "This use of technology is largely taking place in the absence of well-designed studies . . ." (p. 291).

Since 1995, a small group of studies have been published that represent an attempt to identify methods for teaching on-line. Unfortunately, these studies have not provided consistent results. Some authors (Thyer et al., 1998) have found that face-to-face teaching provided a better learning experience for students in which to learn and practice skills. Further, Thyer and Polk (1997) demonstrated that students preferred face-to-face teaching over distance approaches. These findings are supported by Tyler and Baylen (1998), who also found that students preferred and performed better in a face-to-face setting. However, Freddolino (1998) found no difference in the satisfaction level of students or in other learning outcomes between distance and traditional students. Similarly, Stocks and Freddolino (1998) found that students participating in an Internet-based research methods course had similar course outcomes to those in the face-to-face course.

In the absence of solid research that can be used to direct on-line instruction, assumptions may be made that educators can simply transfer their current practices to this new medium. However, research has demonstrated that alterations are necessary. For instance, Boling and Robinson (1999) have demonstrated that student groups engaged in cooperative learning tasks learn the most, while those using multimedia have a higher level of satisfaction. Findings such as these have resulted in attempts to create cooperative learning groups on-line. However, Scifres, Gundersen, and Behara (1998) found that team development is different when live versus virtual teams are compared. Virtual team members overall tend to be less satisfied with their project, and believe they give more individual effort in comparison to others on the team.

Due to these inconsistent research results, and because on-line teaching and learning result in dynamics that are different than

those found in a traditional classroom, educators in general, particularly those involved in graduate education programs, need to be careful in their approach to on-line instruction (Council of Graduate Schools, 1998). Recognizing this need for caution as well as a need to provide counselor educators with direction, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Technology Interest Network established a work committee to develop a set of standards that could provide direction for students and educators interested in on-line instruction.

This ad hoc committee drafted a set of guidelines that were widely disseminated among interest group members for feedback and discussion. Working electronically, counselor educators, practitioners, and others provided the committee with input and direction over a period of months in 1998 and early 1999. A final set of standards was reviewed at the 1999 Annual Convention of the American Counseling Association and adopted by ACES in May 1999.

In all, 27 guidelines that inform counselor educators of critical issues that require careful consideration in the development of on-line courses were identified. The guidelines were then organized into sections that mirror the proposed Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs standards for traditional instructional practices (CACREP, 1997). The sections include course quality, course content/objectives, instructional support, faculty qualifications, instructor/course evaluation, technological standards, and grievance procedures.

The complete approved standards (ACES, 1999a) are represented in this chapter along with brief discussions to help counselor educators and others understand the intentions of the authors and contributors and to further promote quality practice in counselor education. Concerns related to guideline implementation and on-line course design are also presented.

GUIDELINES FOR ON-LINE INSTRUCTION IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Course Quality

1. The course must offer, at a minimum, an equivalent educational opportunity to that provided in a traditional course. This should

include equality in the domains of information, skill building, and course evaluation.

Discussion: Distance learning offerings should be held accountable to the same standards for quality as traditional courses. Objectives that cannot be maintained at the same level, and that cannot be reasonably modified or replaced with equivalent objectives, should be delivered in a traditional format.

2. Specific course content must be amenable to effective delivery in the manner proposed.

   Discussion: Some courses may readily lend themselves to many distance learning formats. Other courses may lend themselves to only a limited range of formats, while some may not be appropriate for distance delivery. In deciding when and how to deliver instruction outside of a traditional framework, faculty should focus on specific objectives, and determine the best manner in which to meet each group of learning objectives.

3. Reasonable efforts must be taken by the institution to ensure that the student has been responsible for course work submitted.

   Discussion: Some arrangement needs to be made to attempt to ensure that the registered student has completed the required course work. This does not necessarily mean that every course will require some direct meeting, but at some point a direct meeting where the identity of the student can be verified, and a thorough evaluation of all distance courses and student learning can be completed, should be included. One alternative may be to use proctored exams that can be administered at distance sites.

4. Distance learning courses must provide an opportunity for the students to be actively engaged in a learning process beyond simply reviewing text-based material, if the parallel traditional course provides opportunities beyond the review of text-based materials.

   Discussion: Current learning theory suggests that appropriate education of adults involves opportunities to process information, formulate solutions to real-world problems, and apply

abstract theoretical models to specific settings and situations. Traditional classrooms provide opportunity for student interaction, social construction of knowledge, and human contact that cannot be replicated simply by reviewing text materials. Distance learning offerings need to consider carefully how to replicate these experiences to provide a broad range of learning opportunity.

5. Distance learning courses should not be limited to a re-creation of a traditional face-to-face course but should be specifically designed to take advantage of educational opportunities provided by the medium used to deliver the course.

   Discussion: To provide the most effective educational opportunities available, instructors must fully utilize the tools available to them, and build upon the strength of each tool utilized. Advanced technology offers the opportunity to develop new approaches to learning that take full advantage of the technology to move beyond what has been done in the past.

6. The differential impact on student learning that is likely to occur to those students taught in a distance fashion must be considered, and any potential problems must be guarded against or steps for remediation provided.

   Discussion: It is unclear at the current time if distance education approaches are equal in all respects to more traditional instructional settings. In some cases, students may gain more, while in others they may gain less. To ensure appropriate educational standards, a range of potential outcomes should be assessed including skills, knowledge, attitudes, personal development, and professional orientation. Distance courses should meet the needs of students in each domain, or steps must be taken to ensure that student's needs in those domains not met through distance education are met in an alternative format.

7. In those cases where distance classes provide for a meeting opportunity for students, the meeting environment should be one that is supportive of and conducive to the educational process.

   Discussion: Not all physical environments meet the needs for educational meetings. If groups of students are meeting in a face-to-face setting, the physical space provided must be ade-

quately designed and equipped to meet the specific needs of the learning group.

8. As in all courses at the university level, issues of equity and diversity should be addressed and promoted in a distance environment.

   Discussion: A variety of variables influence individual students' communication styles, learning needs, and behavioral patterns. Approaches to distance education may not meet the needs of all students, and the instructor and institution involved have a responsibility to monitor student behavior, learning, and communication to ensure that individual needs are met, and that individual differences are recognized as strengths and, as appropriate, built upon.

Course Content/Objectives

9. Distance-based classes should be designed to meet a specific need.

   Discussion: Distance education opportunities should be judiciously and wisely chosen to meet a specific set of needs. The availability of technology does not dictate its use anymore than the availability of medication suggests it is the best response to all clients. By focusing on specific needs and working to meet these, institutions can ensure that distance offerings are beneficial.

10. Because counseling courses often involve the exchange of sensitive information about clients and students, security precautions need to be implemented and enforced that ensure appropriate protection of this information.

    Discussion: Client and student confidentiality will be maintained via methods such as, but not limited to, data encryption, pseudonym use, password protection on various access levels to the Internet and other communication programs, and a method of security for the verification of postal delivery of sensitive information.

11. If the objectives for a specific distance class are different than those for an on-campus class, then appropriate steps must be taken to ensure that every distance student receives appropriate remediation to meet all objectives.

Discussion: Programs that provide opportunities for students to learn at a distance must ensure that the educational opportunities provided for all students are equivalent. In some cases, certain objectives may not be appropriately addressed through some distance modalities. In those cases, equivalent opportunities may be provided through alternative formats to ensure student success.

12. Appropriate procedures for evaluation of student learning must be implemented.

    Discussion: Counselor education addresses knowledge, skills, and attitudes in students. Evaluation procedures need to be devised that allow for assessment of growth in each of these areas. Additionally, procedures need to be implemented to ensure that the material submitted as documentation of student learning is genuine.

Instructional Support

13. Students must have access to equivalent educational supports including library resources, tutorial assistance, and access to the course instructor.

    Discussion: The university experience expands beyond the walls of the individual classroom and the information provided in a text. A variety of support materials, ancillary contacts, and personal relationships are successfully combined in a well-balanced academic environment. Care must be taken to move beyond simply providing class lectures or reading material on-line to incorporating the entirety of the academic experience that the student otherwise would have in a traditional setting.

14. Students must be provided with the opportunity to receive complete training in the technology prior to being required to use the technology and should be provided with ongoing support throughout the educational experience.

    Discussion: Just as faculty cannot be expected to maintain currency in all aspects of technology, neither can students. Clear expectations should be established prior to enrollment in a course about the student's competencies in relation to the use of specific technology. If students who are enrolled

do not meet these competencies, then it is the responsibility of the institution to provide training and support to help students in those areas where skills and knowledge are lacking. If during the period of time that a student is receiving instruction the interface, technological demands, or other aspects of technology change, the institution must take reasonable steps to ensure that students are trained/retrained to handle these changes adequately. Institutions have a responsibility to provide adequate support services that can be readily accessed to resolve student difficulties that result from a lack of knowledge or skills, changes in software or equipment, software or equipment malfunction, or other circumstances over which the institution has control or responsibility.

15. Financial resources must be available to meet the needs of the distance learning activities.

    Discussion: Institutions should be aware prior to undertaking distance-based educational offerings that standard methods of calculating the institutions' financial commitment and needs may not be applicable to new modalities. In all cases, institutions must, in advance, make the necessary financial commitment to ensure that student needs are met.

16. Students must be provided with adequate access to faculty in a timely fashion.

    Discussion: This may occur through the use of specific electronic media as long as students have been provided the opportunity for appropriate training.

17. The specific purpose and outcomes of a distance delivery method is to be explained prior to the beginning of the course and included in the syllabus.

    Discussion: For most students, distance learning opportunities will be new. Prior to agreeing to participate in this environment, students must have adequate information about the course, procedures, and expectations to make an informed decision about the appropriateness of this modality in meeting their own learning goals.

18. Appropriate policies must be developed and disseminated concerning expectations for student attendance, time commitments, and other faculty expectations for performance.

Discussion: Many students will have no experience working in a distance learning setting. Because of this lack of exposure, and because distance learning approaches can vary substantially, students can be expected to have little accurate information concerning expectations for performance. It is incumbent upon faculty to ensure that students understand fully expectations for performance prior to enrollment in distance education whenever possible, or as early in the process as is practicable.

19. Courses need to reflect sound pedagogy, and where appropriate, opportunities for student interaction and collaboration on specific course materials must be provided.

    Discussion: Traditional approaches to education may not translate easily into a distance environment. It is the responsibility of the faculty member to ensure that the pedagogy employed is valid and appropriate based on the needs of the students and objectives of the course.

20. Support resources, such as books, videos, and computer software, must be made available to students in a manner that is reasonable for those students who have enrolled in an on-line or distance class.

    Discussion: If services are anticipated to be provided to students at a long distance from the main campus, then reasonable steps must be taken to provide those students with access to support materials at distance sites, or the students must be fully informed in advance that they will not have access and that there will be portions of the learning opportunity that will not be available to them.

Faculty Qualifications

21. Faculty instructing distance education courses should be of equivalent experience and eligible for academic rank in the same manner as their on-site counterparts.

    Discussion: Faculty involved in distance learning opportunities need to be fully involved in all aspects of the academic program, just as they would be if they were involved in more traditional offerings. Although some distinctions in qualifications may be appropriate in terms of knowledge of tech-

nology or other specialty areas, the breadth and degree of training and experience should be as extensive as that of any other faculty member.

22. Faculty must be fully trained in all aspects of the technology that is used to deliver the course, and continuous ongoing support must be provided by the educational institution.

    Discussion: The faculty member delivering instruction needs to have the requisite skills necessary to implement successfully the effective use of whatever teaching tools are used in the delivery of material. However, faculty outside of computer-oriented disciplines cannot be expected to stay current in the rapidly evolving field of computers and related technology. Therefore, institutions that use advanced technology as a delivery tool must be prepared to provide the support necessary to ensure that these tools are used appropriately. This must include support in the design, delivery, student access, and updating of on-line or computer-based materials.

23. In those cases where appropriate, qualified mentors or discussion leaders are required, the same standards must exist for determining quality and ability of these support personnel as would be used in a traditional setting.

    Discussion: In all cases, equivalency of quality should be sought between on-line and traditional settings.

24. Faculty assignment to distance education courses must reflect the actual faculty involvement, including adequate time and resources for faculty training, course preparation, and technology adaptation.

    Discussion: Faculty who undertake to teach classes at a distance are substantially increasing their responsibilities in ways that many institutions are unprepared to understand and acknowledge. Institutions are responsible to monitor faculty behavior and involvement, to assist faculty in transitioning to new modalities of teaching, and to compensate faculty adequately for the additional time necessary to succeed in this new arena.

Instructor/Course Evaluation

25. Course/instructor evaluations for distance classes must be implemented to be commensurate with procedures used for eval-

uation of classes taught through traditional methods. Students participating in distance classes must be given the opportunity to provide course/instructor evaluations anonymously (e.g., by returning evaluations via the U.S. Postal Service).

Technological Standards

26. Technological problems will occur that will require appropriate back-up and/or face-to-face technologies.

    Discussion: These back-up technologies should be designed to maintain the integrity of the course in a manner that provides as little disruption to student learning as possible. If student learning is disrupted or a student cannot complete a course due to technological issues that are the responsibility of the educational institution, then the institution is responsible for providing the student with alternative means that will meet his or her specific needs in relation to the original learning contract.

Grievance Procedures

27. Procedures to address grievances of the student must be implemented.

    Discussion: These procedures must be responsive to the needs of students "at a distance." If a student population is developed and instructional programs maintained that do not require on-campus activities for learning, then students cannot be burdened with expectations of on-campus activities for administrative dealings such as filing a complaint against an instructor.

ON-LINE COURSE DESIGN: IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDELINES

Counselor educators are ultimately concerned with educating counselors-in-training; thus the primary concern associated with implementing on-line instruction is how it will affect students' learning as well as their understanding of counseling skills, processes, and practices. At present, little is known about how on-line instruction influences counselor trainees' learning or skill acquisition. Yet it seems relatively certain that administrators and institutions will continue to encourage (i.e., expect) faculty and

programs to design and deliver courses on-line. And counselor educators must position themselves to respond to such expectations. The guidelines presented here represent the range of concerns that counselor educators who are interested in developing on-line learning environments must be prepared to address. No single guideline is seen as being necessarily more important than any of the others, although some have argued that if the first two guidelines are not satisfied, the remaining issues are rendered moot.

Place-bound counselor education students will expect faculty and programs to use computer technology and make professional preparation programs more available and convenient to complete. They will also be concerned about the quality of the instruction that they receive. From their perspective, any course that is delivered on-line should satisfy the instructional standards that the department requires of courses that utilize the traditional face-to-face format. In short, place-bound students want assurances that their program will prepare them to fulfill their professional aspirations and responsibilities. The guidelines presented here can be used to develop on-line courses that will address students' needs and expectations.

Recognizing that counselor educators and place-bound students share an interest in and concern for the quality of on-line instruction, this chapter's authors offer the following sequence of steps for designing an on-line course.

- **Step 1: Identify instructional goals for on-line instruction.** Adoption of the guidelines will influence the manner in which the instructional goals of the program will be implemented. Because a variety of different stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, staff, and administrators) have an interest in such a decision, it is important to identify the goals of each stakeholder and determine how these goals relate to the on-line course and program goals. One question to ask is, How might the technology, on-line course work, or the on-line process minimize or enhance the overall goals of the program and participants?
- **Step 2: Determine technological competence of instructors and students.** Traditional instructional methods place little or no emphasis on the technological competence of either faculty or students. On-line instruction introduces dramatic

changes into the instructional milieu by altering some elements of the space and time relationships that link students with faculty, with other students, or with facilities that are commonly found on a campus (American Council on Education, 1996). For on-line instruction to work, both faculty and students must be prepared to manage these changes because serious gaps in domains of technical competence will seriously limit the utility of an on-line course. Thus it is important to assess the technological competence of instructors and students both prior to and during the development and delivery of on-line instruction. The ACES-recommended technical competencies (ACES, 1999b; Appendix 2) could serve as a basis for conducting an initial assessment.

- **Step 3: Provide relevant learning opportunities for faculty and students.** Successfully completing an on-line course means that both the instructor and the learner have to co-exist with technology without it becoming a barrier to instruction. In order to enhance instruction, it will be important to eliminate as many technological barriers as possible. This goal can be achieved by providing relevant learning opportunities to all participants. This training process could be applied to all of the components of a distance learning environment including, but not limited to, e-mail communication, real-time conferencing, videotape supervision, and telephone/conference call applications.

CONCLUSION

The expansion of on-line instruction in higher education has been very rapid, and its popularity among administrators and institutions is expected to grow. Given its popularity among campus administrators, it is expected that various methods of on-line instruction will either be blended with or replace the traditional instructional strategies that are most commonly used in higher education programs, including counselor education. At present, most counselor educators are just beginning to explore the possibilities of using on-line instruction. Nonetheless, the transition from the exclusive use of traditional methods to the adoption of on-line instructional strategies has begun. As counselor educators become

more familiar with on-line instruction, the rate of the transition will, in all likelihood, increase until sometime soon every graduate of a counselor preparation program will have completed a portion of his or her program on-line.

This transition from face-to-face to on-line instruction also illustrates the need for guidelines that can be used to guide the development of courses that will be substantially equivalent in terms of content, quality, instructional support, and faculty qualifications. The guidelines presented here represent an initial response to that need. As more becomes known about on-line instruction and what does and does not work for students in counseling programs, or as technological advances enhance the quality of and possibilities for on-line instruction, it will be important to revisit and modify these guidelines. For now, this chapter's authors believe that the guidelines can be used to inform the profession's discussion about this critical issue.

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